

# A Baby's Teeth Preserve Space for Permanent Ones

This is one of a series of articles on dental health prepared by the Harbor Dental Society, an affiliate of the American Dental Association.)

Q—My child's baby teeth seem to decay easily, and one tooth has been lost. Will the permanent ones be affected?

A—They may be. One important function of the first or baby teeth is to preserve the space needed for the permanent teeth to erupt. Too early loss of a baby tooth may mean a crooked permanent one, since the remaining baby teeth tend to drift into the vacant space and close it off. First teeth need the same diligent home and professional dental care as permanent

teeth.

Q—Can a person in the 40s whose teeth are out of position be helped or must he start younger than that?

A—Childhood is the best time to prevent or correct faulty bite and crooked teeth, but adults, too, can be helped. An orthodontist's advice should be sought.

Q—Can periodontal disease be treated?

A—Periodontal disease usually can be treated. In the early stages of the disease, the gums gradually become swollen, usually are red and stand away from the teeth. The gums may bleed when the teeth are brushed. Bleeding and swollen gums often cause so

little discomfort that many persons accept them as if they were normal conditions. If not treated, the inflammation spreads along the roots of the teeth, and as it progresses, the bone supporting the teeth recedes. The teeth loosen and are often lost. The dentist will have to treat the infection and may have to remove diseased tissues. Splints may reduce the movement of loose teeth; some may have to be extracted. The best treatment for periodontal disease is to prevent it. Toothbrushing after each meal, healthful diet and regular visits to the dentist can prevent the conditions which lead to it.

Q—Can a denture be con-

structed from an old picture of me?

A—No. If a denture is to fit properly, you must visit a dentist. He needs to study the shape and condition of your mouth—the jawbone, jaw and facial muscles, the ridges and gums which are to support the denture. Further, the denture must be checked in your mouth after it is constructed and may need minor additional adjustments after you have worn it a few weeks. There is no other way to obtain a denture that will not be harmful and that will be an asset to your health and appearance.

Q—Once a tooth has become abscessed, can it be treated or must it be lost?

A—It may be possible to save the tooth. If the nerve or pulp has become injured, the dentist may be able to remove the damaged part, and restore the tooth to normal function. Such treatment, known as endodontics, is successful in

85 per cent of the teeth treated.

Q—If a toothache goes away in a few days, is it a sign that the tooth has repaired itself?

A—No. Pain is nature's warning that something is wrong. A tooth cannot repair itself. If the pain stops, the tooth pulp may have degenerated. Devitalized teeth, unless properly treated, constitute a health hazard. Diseases of the gums or bone surrounding the teeth may also feel like a toothache.

Q—Is it true that teeth can really last a person's lifetime?

A—Yes, with proper care. That means: toothbrushing each time you eat to remove food particles and decay-producing bacteria; a well-balanced diet, low in sugar; drinking fluoridated water, preferably from birth, and at least two visits a year to your dentist.



CHECK PLANS . . . Prominent area architects are among the experts who are currently considering entries in the Balanced Power Architectural Scholarship Contest for students at El Camino College. Checking entries in the contest are (from left) Tom Taft, Southern California Gas Co.; Al Palmer, college architecture instructor; Earl Mason, AIA, Redondo Beach; Neil Palmer, AIA, Palos Verdes; and Roy Young, AIA, Torrance. The winner of the contest will be announced soon.

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